



Zombie Schoolgirl



IN LOVE



by
Alessa

Zombie Schoolgirl in Love

by Alessa

We sat in a mouldy, decrepit hall, the curtains closed, the lights not working, and silence looming. Rain pattered heavily against the roof and window panes. It was a strange and foreign place for me and my best friend to find ourselves in, but given the recent events, it was evident *something* needed to be said.

I'd known Paige for a long time and could read her like an open book, something I was proud of. It was an art form. Everyone at our school wished they had known Paige as well as me, but none came close to knowing her as well as I did.

Right now, Paige was picking at the hole in her already messy jeans almost violently, her brow creased, her mouth twitching as if at any moment she would explode with a frenzied lecture on the dangers of guys who wanted nothing else but to ruin the lives of girls like me.

She was angry. But I knew that. Hell, every single person who had been at the party knew that.

"I'm scared," I whispered quietly into the darkness. The thunder crashed outside, and the entire room appeared to vibrate with the force of the raging storm.

We were still inside the vacant hall that had been hired by the girl who had hosted the party. Casey, Katy, or Kelly. It's always some Daddy's little rich girl hoping for a chance to boost her popularity. The hall was large, and old, and creaky—the perfect setting for a Halloween party.

"No, you're not," Paige said, staring at me with her you're-in-so-much-trouble face. I took a quick note of how pretty it was before mentally slapping myself.

I considered her statement for a moment; my face no longer scared, and my back straightened. "You're right. I'm not." I sighed. "But can I have a hug anyway?"

Usually the shy-smile trick worked on Paige. But tonight was an exceptional situation.

"No," she said bluntly. She was sitting with her back against the wall while I rested against the base of an empty bookshelf, a good five feet apart. There was a reason for that.

Everything was silent again for a few minutes.

"Please?" I whined, flashing her puppy-dog eyes, which wasn't quite as effective when you're dressed as a dead schoolgirl. There was more thunder, and this time I really jumped.

"No!" she glared at me. It seems I have unleashed the beast. I had a sudden urge to run for cover. "Seriously, Lily, how the fuck could you've done that?" Her eyes were on fire. Funny enough, I didn't

imagine she'd get any angrier than she had been only half an hour before. She was also really pretty, I noticed again, angry or not. Mind slap.

"I didn't mean to, Paige!" I gushed for the hundredth time tonight.

"No, of course you didn't. You just kissed him by accident."

"Hey, Miss smarty-pants, *he* was the one who kissed me!" I pointed at myself and raised my eyebrows in dramatic effect, reminding her of the blond-haired guy in a Superman costume I'd been dancing with at the party.

Paige imitated my raised eyebrows, clearly mocking me for being annoyed with her. She had no right. It really wasn't my fault that Superman kissed me.

"You didn't exactly push him away," she grumbled, diverting her green eyes back to the storm still raging outside.

"I was confused... and I did stop kissing him..." I looked down at my glittery sneakers. They were no longer on my feet. They were soaking wet from the rain, and I couldn't walk in them. But when you throw a fuming best friend into the mix who walks five times faster than you, it suddenly becomes rather pointless, so I kicked them off my feet and ran after Paige, wearing only my knee socks.

"When exactly?!"

"When you punched him..." I trailed off, and then even quieter, "Poor sod."

"Poor sod?! That asshole was sucking on your face so hard it would make Dracula blush!"

To be fair, I had been dressed rather provocatively. My plaid school skirt did not even reach my mid-thigh, the white blouse with adorable puffy sleeves revealed my bare midriff, and around my collar I tied a school ribbon that matched my skirt. Despite all this, I still came across as a rather unconvincing zombie schoolgirl, while Paige looked fantastic. I tried to assure myself that it wasn't due to my uninspiring tardiness. Okay, so I merely splattered some fake blood on my regular school uniform, which made Mom furious because she said it would never come off again and she would have to purchase a new uniform, which was quite expensive. But at least my makeup was better than Paige's, which was now smudged and had left an odd print on her jeans.

"You're overreacting," I scoffed. "In fact, you're being hysterical."

"And you're being ungrateful," I half expected her to finish with "young lady", but she didn't.

"I just kissed a guy. You punched him. Do I have to remind you that girls don't go around punching guys? One of these days you'll have your ass handed to you."

"Yeah... well..." she sputtered, "it wouldn't be the first time."

She was right, too. Paige used to get into fights with boys because she would defend me whenever a resident school bully tried to jump on me. It left her with bruises and marks more often than not, but

she never complained about it. Paige was always the first to protect me, and I was the one who later put band-aids on her cuts.

"Paige, you can't look after me forever. You didn't even know the guy."

"So what? I don't have to know him to punch him. What exactly did you think I would do?"

"I don't know, maybe 'Hey, Lily, you amazing best friend. There's a guy hanging on your face' might have been an itsy bit better?"

"Would that have worked?"

"Yeahhhh..." I lied. "Okay, no. But you didn't need to punch him! God, I'm not a little kid, Paige. I'm a year younger than you. It might have been okay to boss me around when I was five, but I'm thirteen now. I don't need you to be like my... my... damn sister!"

An unreadable emotion flashed across Paige's face. "Why in hell would I want to be your sister? You're so clueless sometimes, Lily!"

Her words hurt more than I dared to admit. I looked away from her, my bottom lip trembling already. It annoyed me that everything Paige said or did seemed to affect me so much. She could reduce me to tears with only a few words.

Paige sighed and rested her head in her hands. "Don't cry, Lils," her voice was muffled by the rain beating against the windows. Her beautiful face looked tired. Her black hair was a messy wob with green Halloween face paint in it, but it still looked pretty cute. She had a soft jawline and deep green eyes. It was hardly my fault that I cared so much about her.

"I didn't mean it like that, Lily."

"I know," I whispered, for real this time. Silence returned.

Paige sighed in defeat. "You still up for that hug?"

I nodded quickly, childishly, before she could change her mind. Paige's hugs were like magic, even if it meant my heart went racing to the point where I feared it might burst, tensing up and acting all weird, or relaxing too much and forgetting completely that we were only friends.

She looked up and opened her arms to me. Consoled by her offer, I slid towards her, blushing slightly, and folded myself against my best friend. Paige averted her gaze, blushing too. Now that I think about it, she had been rather red in the face for most of the evening. She was also, undoubtedly, still angry at me, too.

I slid into the space next to her and leaned against her chest. Her arms wrapped protectively around me. The soft and gentle hug warmed me while the storm raged outside. I closed my eyes, but in the back of my mind, her words still hurt. Usually, Paige is the tense one, but today, as we hugged awkwardly in the empty, dark room, so was I. Despite everything that transpired tonight, I accepted the temptation to settle into her embrace and curl up to her, numbing the pain of her words.

Clueless?

I was sure Paige hadn't meant it, but there was bitter resentment behind it. And she'd said 'sister' with such venom. I could be a nuisance sometimes, I knew as much. Countless times I had been told by kids at school to 'back off', but it stung to know that, despite her own feelings and all the years we spent together, Paige didn't feel close enough to consider herself part of my family.

I tried to relax in her arms, thankful that my heartbeat remained steady enough. We were so close together that she might feel it if it increased even by a beat. I realised then how close exactly we were and blushed.

It certainly wasn't the first time we hugged. God knows we've made a lot of excuses to wrap our arms around each other. But this time, it was different in some ways. More intimate, closer, and safer than before. And as hard as I tried to calm my thumping heart, its speed increased steadily, like a scared bunny fleeing from its own shadow.

When I opened my eyes to see her hands clasping my shirt, I suddenly felt like crying again. This entire situation meant something different to me than it did to Paige. I started to pull away, pushing gently at her chest, but she wouldn't let go. A pair of arms held me securely in place.

"Paige?" I whispered against her shoulder, panicking slightly.

Her grip only seemed to tighten. For a moment, I thought she might have fallen asleep and was using me as a teddy bear. It wouldn't be the first time. I remained in her arms quietly, completely unsure of what to do.

"Paigey?" I tried again, and when she spoke, her voice was strained.

"Please," she begged quietly, "Please, Lily, just a few more minutes."

I was startled, to say the least. My arms were covered in tiny goose bumps, and my heart beat a war drum in my chest. The only logical explanation I could come up with was that Paige was sorry for punching the guy.

All too soon, Paige's arms dropped back to her sides, and I felt her move back reluctantly. The atmosphere was heavy with tension.

"Apology accepted," I said with a small, uncertain smile, breaking the silence. Paige looked at me with a strange expression.

"Apology? For what?"

I was taken back and immediately regretted ever saying it. "For... punching that guy..." I murmured in a voice as small as I felt, but it only made the situation worse. We had fought before. In fact, we argued and disagreed most of the time, but this time, the harsh words seemed to hang in the air as a constant reminder.

"I'm not sorry," she look almost furious again. I shuffled away. "I'm sorry for making you almost cry, and I'm sorry for dragging you to that god-awful party, but I'll be damned if I'm sorry about that guy."

"Oh."

She was confused.

"I'm sorry if you want me to be like your sister," she added, her eyes sad.

"I.. I don't," I whispered before I could stop myself.

"I can't be your sister. It would kill me..."

"I don't want you to be my sister," I pretended cheerfully. "I mean, you're my best friend. Why on earth would you be my sister?" I faulted on the last word. "As if I'm not annoying enough already." Dread filled me at my own admission. This Halloween party was a mistake. I'd rather be at the dentist right now than facing the uncomfortable truth.

"I.. I don't want to be your best friend either," Paige stuttered, turning bright red. "Lily, it's been different for a while now. Being friends with you is hard."

Suddenly, the world fell apart around me. I felt my heart break and shatter into a million pieces, and tears well up in my eyes. She didn't want me, most likely despised me, and it hurt more than I dared to admit. I rose to my feet and put on the same fake smile as before. I was confused, and angry, and sad.

Paige reached for me, attempting to talk. So that's what the hug was all about—a goodbye.

The rational side of my brain screamed at me that I was supposed to let her explain herself. But the notion of Paige abandoning me after a lifetime of friendship made my knees buckle. What was I going to do without her?

"Oh, look at the time." I didn't have a watch, and even if I did, I doubted I'd be able to read it with tears blurring my vision. "I've got to go."

"Lily, let me explain."

But she didn't need to. She'd been acting strange for a long time, and she didn't want anyone to notice. The strange looks, the stiff hugs. Of course she didn't want me. Not as a friend. Not in any way.

"It's fine, Paige. It doesn't matter. You're right; I don't deserve you." And then I fled the room, big, fat tears rolling down my cold cheeks.

Idiot! my mind screamed as I ran down the wooden stairs of the house. I wasn't sure if the insult was directed at me or Paige.

In retrospect, I should have seen this coming. Paige was a popular girl and so pretty, and I was... me—the half-wit that had just shouted a bunch of useless crap at her best friend and then run from her before she could even say anything. Only a few hours ago, my life had been fine.

"Lily!" I heard the familiar voice shout from behind me somewhere, and then her confident footsteps on the stairs. Blinded by the tears, I somehow reached the front door, fumbling with the handle until it finally sprung open so I could run out into the rain.

"LILY!" Paige shouted behind her, nearer this time, "LET ME EXPLAIN!"

You don't need to, I wanted to shout. We've known each other since we were tiny. I'm allowed to cry alone.

I felt dizzy. My Halloween makeup was running down my face, the blood-splattered school uniform was sticking to my body in the pouring rain. My feet were bare, except for the knee socks. Not so sexy now, Lily, are you?

I felt a familiar hand take hold of me.

Something told me I should pull away, the way they do it in the movies from the '40s, but I was pathetic, and cold, and so, so tired... Instead, I fell into my ex-best friend's arms.

"Lily," Paige whispered while I cried quietly against her shoulder, "I've gone about this all wrong, haven't I?" She laughed humorlessly and tucked her thumb under my chin so I would look at her. She gazed at me for a few seconds, looking worried and somewhat happy. I hated how cool it always made her look. "You really are clueless, Lily. And kinda rude."

I punched her on the arm. "Are you trying to apologise or what?" I scowled, confused, still crying and praying she could tell my tears from raindrops.

"Listen to me, Lils." Rain sliding down her face ruined the only good part of her costume. "Today I punched that guy."

I could feel her anxiety fading and her annoyance rising. "I know; our faces were touching when it happened."

She flinched, blinking against the rain. But we'd both forgotten about the weather.

"And I will do it again."

"Why? He's hardly going to kiss me again after today."

"No. I mean, if someone kisses you, I might punch them. I probably won't be able to help it," she smirked, half jokingly.

I stared at her as if she had just escaped from a lunatic asylum. My tears had dried up, and with each word she spoke, my mind became more muddled.

"But... why, Paige?" I said, stunned.

"Because I don't want to be your best friend," she smiled softly, "or your sister, or your shoulder to cry on, or your childhood companion. I don't want to be that to you, Lily."

It was completely unfair how she could still look so appealing when it was pelting with rain. She'd broken my heart and was now speaking in riddles.

"Because... I want to be your everything."

Wait... "Huh?" was the most intelligent thing I could muster. It seemed that not only my clothes but my entire brain had turned to mush.

"Wait, did I say it wrong? Oh God," she was flustered, running a hand through her wet hair. "Lily, what I mean is... I like you," she said softly, as if puzzled by her own voice. "No, no, that's wrong, too. Lily, I love you."

I continued to stare at her in total wonderment.

"Oh no, did I scare you? 'Cause I totally didn't mean to. I know I should just ask you out for ice cream or something, but it's too cold for ice cream. Do you wanna go to the movies and a strawberry milkshake instead? Or Zoo? You love those little baby elephants... right?"

And then I did something I never thought I had the guts to do. I kissed her on the lips. Right there, in the rain, dressed as a brain-eating schoolgirl, barefoot and covered in make-up.

Paige froze.

"The movies," I said against her lips, despite the giant mutant butterflies attacking my stomach, "...sounds great."

Paige laughed with visible relief and mashed her lips to mine, snatching me possessively until I was pressed against her, covered in goose bumps and shivering from happiness.

We both laughed against the kiss.

"You really had me scared for a moment back there," I whispered.

"I'm sorry, Lils."

"Yeah, well, now you get to make it up to me. You ain't getting off easy," I smirked, my lips still hovering a few millimetres away from her own.

"I'll do anything for the most beautiful, drenched zombie I've ever known," Paige breathed against my skin.

I turned around and started walking back to the house, out of the rain. Paige trailed behind me, holding my hand, dazed and fully aware that I would make her pay for the pain she'd caused me today. And I suspected she'd be quite happy to do anything I asked her for eternity as long as she was doing it for me.

"Oh, and by the way," I called over my shoulder, eyebrows raised and cheeks blushing like a tomato, "I love you, too!"

The End